

# Minutes of a Regular Meeting Town of Los Altos Hills PLANNING COMMISSION

Approved January 5, 2012

THURSDAY, December 1, 2011, 7:00 p.m.  
Council Chambers, 26379 Fremont Road

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## 1. ROLL CALL AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at Town Hall.

Present: Chairman Collins and Commissioners: Abraham, Clow, Harpootlian and Partridge.

Absent: None

Staff: Debbie Pedro, Planning Director; Richard Chiu, City Engineer/ Public Works Director; and Sarah Corso, Community Development Specialist.

## 2. PRESENTATIONS FROM THE FLOOR – none

## 3. PUBLIC HEARINGS-

Planning Commission Ex Parte Contacts Policy Disclosure: **Commissioner Harpootlian** met with Edwina Cioffi, resident at 14250 Baleri Ranch Road, on the Arastradero site.

- 3.1 STUDY SESSION on the Retaining Wall Design for the Arastradero Trail Improvement Project; The proposed retaining wall along Arastradero Road will be approximately 475 feet long with heights ranging from 3 to 10 feet tall; File # 269-11-MISC (staff-Debbie Pedro).

**Commissioner Partridge** recused himself from the discussion noting a potential conflict of interest, as he is an employee of Stanford University.

**Debbie Pedro, Planning Director**, presented the staff report. The proposed project includes three types of Improvement: restoration of existing pathways, construction of new pathways, and bike lane stripping and road widening. The Arastradero path is included in the 1981 Master Path Map and the 2005 Master Path Map update.

The Town has received comments from a number of residents about the project, which include geotechnical issues from excavation of the hillside, declining property values, and increased parking problems. Many of the concerns will be addressed at a future Planning Commission meeting. The focus of the study session is to discuss the proposed retaining wall.

Four retaining wall designs have been explored by staff: Stacked Crib Wall (Living Wall), Soldier Bean Wall with timber Lagging, Soil Nail Shotcrete Wall with Stone Facing, and Soil Nail Shotcrete Wall with Boulderscape (faux rock) Finish.

The proposed retaining wall will be constructed along Arastradero Road, will be approximately 475 linear feet long, and will range from three to ten feet tall. **Richard Chiu, City Engineer/Public Works Director** presented design details for the retaining walls. The Pathway Committee has considered the options at their meeting on October 24, 2011, and recommended the boulderscape wall with the faux rock finish.

**Richard Chiu** explained that the proposed wall will be placed near Stirrup Way along Arastradero Road. There have been some concerns about sight distance coming out of Stirrup Way, which will be improved with the wall. The wall will cut into the hillside and be pushed back ten feet from the curb. A safety fence of about 42 inches tall will be placed on top of the retaining wall.

**Chairman Collins** asked staff about the tentative scheduling of the project and the availability of the environmental document to the public.

**Debbie Pedro** stated that the environmental review document should be available to the public around mid-January. There is a required 30 day circulation period for the document. Neighbors will be notified when the environmental document is available. Town notices will be sent to neighbors and interested parties on the mailing list, will be posted to the Town's website, and advertised in the local newspaper.

**Commissioner Abraham** asked about the estimation of cost for the Stacked Crib Wall.

**Richard Chiu** stated that the costs are rough numbers which came from an analysis done by Stanford.

**Commissioner Harpootlian** asked staff to show the dimensions of a cross sectional view of Arastradero Road where the retaining wall will be the highest. He is not convinced that a wall will be needed in this location, and that the project will result in an over engineered road, which is inconsistent with the Town.

Staff drew a diagram to show the Commission what a road sectional of the area would look like.

Discussion ensued among the Commissioners to whether a retaining wall will be needed to improve the Arastradero Trail.

**Richard Chiu** explained that the travel lanes will not change. There will be two, 14 feet travel lanes with five feet wide bike lanes on each side. Then there will be a curb, one foot shoulder, five foot path, two and a half foot planter strip, and then the wall.

**Commissioner Harpootlian** asked about modifying the project to have only one bike lane, which is consistent with the Town, and may eliminate the need for the wall.

**Richard Chiu** explained that there is some flexibility with the design of the wall. The height of the wall could be modified by shrinking the planter strip from two and a half to one foot, or by removing a bike lane.

**Commissioner Harpootlian** asked staff to provide an alternative design to the construction of the roadway and retaining wall. In the alternative he would like to see a smaller retaining wall and the removal of other components of the roadway, which will allow for the smallest wall possible and a road that is least engineered.

**Debbie Pedro** explained that this section of the road currently has a shoulder on each side, which is often used by bicyclists. Eliminating one of the shoulders would be a drastic change from the current condition and potentially reduce the safety for those using the shoulder. The goal of the project is to improve public safety.

She further noted that the intent of this meeting is to recommend a retaining wall design. Discussion related to pathways improvements, road design, and the need for a retaining wall will occur in a future meeting.

**Chairman Collins** expressed concern that if the Commission chooses a design, then the inference will be made that they support the construction of a retaining wall.

**Debbie Pedro** explained that the Commission could recommend a wall design, and also request that staff explore alternatives to the roadway design that would reduce or eliminate the wall.

#### CHAIRMAN COLLINS OPENED THE PUBLIC HEARING

**Martha Bowden, Saddle Court**, supports the wall because it will increase safety in the area which is caused by the high speed of traffic and limited sight distance at the intersection of Arastradero Road and Saddle Court. Near this section of road the shoulder gets narrow, making it dangerous for bicyclists, pedestrians, and equestrians to travel. She believes the design of the wall should be minimal in height, vary in height and slope to be natural, made of material that will minimize tagging, and include vegetation elements to soften the effect. She supports wall design option one.

**Phyllis Jones, Saddle Court**, does not see the benefit of the proposed improvements. However, if there is going to be a retaining wall, she would like staff to be aware that Stirrup Way is the only road that leads to about 20 houses. She is concerned that during construction residents will have a hard time getting in and out of the area.

**Jitze Couperus, Page Mill Road**, suggested choosing a wall that aesthetically conforms to the community. Once the wall design is chosen then the Commission and staff can begin to consider the road width and height of the retaining wall. He believes it is worth considering that Stanford's budget may not be able to completely fund one specific option with the variables specified by staff; however, Stanford may be able to fund another design option at a certain length and height.

**Bent Hessen-Schmidt, Radcliffe Lane**, is in full support of the wall and improving the path, primarily for his children to have a safe way to travel around Town. He believes allowing for

greater bicycle safety may increase the usage of bikes and decrease vehicle travel. He supports the comments of the Commission to reduce the height of the retaining wall, and suggests that the bike path be separated from the roadway.

**Dru Anderson, Saddle Court**, enjoys the trails around Town with her family and is disappointed with the lack of safe trail connections on Arastradero between Stirrup Way and Purissima Road. The low visibility of the Arastradero Road and Stirrup Way intersection warrants cutting into the hillside and constructing a retaining wall. She has attended many of the pathway meetings regarding the wall design and is a member of the ad-hoc Traffic Safety Committee. She believes the best wall design option is the boulderscape design because it is within budget, is least intrusive, and is most flexible to adapt to plantings and keeping the natural feel of the community.

**Commissioner Harpootlian** asked Mrs. Anderson if she was aware of any accidents that have occurred along this portion of Arastradero Road.

**Mrs. Anderson** responded that she is not sure if there have been recorded accidents but she is aware and has provide aid to bicyclists who have been involved in accidents in the area.

**Nancy Couperus, Page Mill Road**, is a member of the Open Space Committee. When reviewing the wall options the committee was interested in the vegetation wall because it blended best with the community, would not be a target for graffiti, and is aesthetically pleasing. The committee was not particularly interested in any of the walls but they felt that the other two options were less in character with the Town. She is not in favor of the retaining wall and is concerned about the trees at the site. She asked staff how many trees would be removed along Arastradero to accommodate the wall.

**Debbie Pedro** identified that seven trees would be removed, the majority located at the corner of Stirrup and Arastradero.

**Mrs. Couperus** asked the Commission if they were aware that in the 1990s Bill Seigel, a Council member and Mayor, applied for a grant to plant the trees along Arastradero Road. She feels it is ironic that the Town is now requesting to remove them. She agrees with Commissioner Harpootlian that staff should reevaluate the width of the entire road, including trail and bike lanes, and make adjustments to the height of the proposed retaining wall.

**Susan Maniscalco, Saddle Court**, supports the proposed boulderscape wall. She believes that with the proper landscaping the wall will look aesthetically pleasing. She supports having a wall because the intersection of Arastradero Road and Stirrup Way is dangerous and having the wall would greatly improve visibility. She requests the wall be as unobtrusive as possible. She would like to see a pathway put in along Arastradero because the current available space to walk is unsafe. Currently she has the option to walk along a chain linked fence in the weeds, or in the bike lane where she fears getting hit by bikes. The speed of cars traveling along Arastradero on average appears much faster than the posted speed of 35 miles per hour.

**Commissioner Abraham** asked Mrs. Maniscalco if the visibility issue at the intersection of Stirrup Way and Arastradero Road is due to the hill or caused by the crown in the road.

**Mrs. Maniscalco** attributes the poor visibility to both the hillside and the crown in the road.

**Rolanda Yang, Stirrup Way**, believes that the retaining wall will add to the dangers of the hillside because behind the retaining wall is a ditch that carries large amounts of water and soil down the hill in the winter. She is concerned about who will protect the safety of the residents from the mudslides.

**Commissioner Harpootlian** asked Richard Chiu if the drainage ditch is addressed in the engineering of the new wall.

**Richard Chiu** explained that there will be a geotechnical report conducted on the site which addresses the sewage and drainage conditions. The wall will be engineered to appropriately deal with the Town drainage ditch.

**Adam Seiver, Saddle Court**, is concerned with the aesthetics of the wall and does not like any of the options presented by staff.

**Sue Welch, member of the Pathway Committee**, has concerns about the height of the wall and the width of the pavement. She would also like to see alternatives presented with varying wall height and widths. She and the other members of the Pathway Committee recommended that the wall be shorter and lower. She requested that staff provide simulations of the various options so community members can have a more realistic picture of the completed wall.

**Commissioner Harpootlian** asked Mrs. Welch about the reasoning behind the Pathway Committee's recommendations to lower the height and shorten the length of the wall, and reducing the width of the roadway.

**Sue Welch** explained that the recommendation made by the Pathway Committee was to make the paths as narrow as possible so the wall could be as short as possible. They also requested that the wall be as green as possible.

**Eileen Gibbons, Chairman of the Pathway Committee**, explained that the vote originally was a split vote but eventually the Committee chose the Shotcrete Wall. In addition, the Committee requested that the wall be stepped. The Committee also recommended that whatever materials are used to build the wall, the overall goals should be to minimize the height and length of the wall, maximize greenery, and minimize the width of the bicycle and pedestrian/equestrian paths to the minimum standards necessary for safety.

**Commissioner Harpootlian** clarified that Arastradero is an arterial road and asked staff if there are different standards regarding path and bike lanes on various road types. He asked the Pathway Committee if they have ever addressed the differences between paths along arterial roads as opposed to side or rural roads.

**Eileen Gibbons** said that the Committee has not addressed the topic.

**Commissioner Abraham** asked Mrs. Gibbons how she felt about having a three foot tall wall with a pathway along the top of the wall, and an additional safety fence.

**Eileen Gibbons** explained that while the Commission has not discussed the topic in depth, they did discuss continuing the portions of the path that are already elevated.

**Jolon Wagner, Robleda Court**, believes the width of the pathway should be wide enough for an equestrian and pedestrian to safely pass without anyone needing to walk in the road. She discussed removing the planter strips and including terracing along the path.

**Ronald Cioffi, Baleri Ranch Road**, believes that the retaining wall would be subject to graffiti. He argued that Town residents live in Los Altos Hills for the landscape and beautiful hills. He supports the idea of safety but believes that pedestrians, equestrians, and bikers need to cooperate and understand why residents live in the hills. He believes the main issue with the Arastradero Road and Stirrup Way intersection is the speed of traffic.

**Luu Young, Stirrup Way**, is concerned about graffiti on the retaining wall. He also believes that the wall is unnecessary because the true danger along Arastradero Road is the speed of traffic.

**Edwina Cioffi, Baleri Ranch Road**, has gathered about 135 signatures from neighbors who agree they do not want a retaining wall to be constructed along Arastradero Road. She believes the wall is inconsistent with the Town's General Plan and the preservation of the natural rural environment. She suggested that the wall would require many local, state, and federal level reviews and measures which will impact the trail. She is concerned about the Town being paid by Stanford University for staff time spent on the project. She also believes that the retaining wall is inconsistent with the Town's zoning ordinances because it will require additional signage, increase parking, and is not consistent with the fence ordinance. She believes that no matter how one tries to disguise a fake wall, it will still look fake.

**Carol Gottlieb, Summerhill Avenue**, supports the path but does not support the retaining wall.

#### CHAIRMAN COLLINS CLOSED THE PUBLIC HEARING

**Commissioner Clow** believes there are two areas of concern regarding the project. The first is safety concerns regarding the speed of traffic along Arastradero Road. Wider street sometimes solicit higher speeds. He believes narrowing the roadway, while keeping the paths five feet wide, would slow vehicles and result in a safer environment. Regarding Stirrup Way, narrowing the roadway would push the road further away from the hillside, allowing for greater visibility. This could eliminate the need for a retaining wall. He would like staff to consider the option of narrowing the road and eliminating the wall. He also believes that graffiti will be a problem. His second concern is deciding on a wall design. He recommends that if a wall is required, that it be the Shotcrete Wall.

**Commissioner Abraham**, would not like to see a retaining wall along Arastradero Road, however if a wall is required, he would choose a stepped, Stacked Crib Wall. In his experience he has observed that this type of wall is commonly used, looks nicer than the other options, and would be the most graffiti resistant. He also suspects that the wall type is earthquake tolerant. Commissioner Abraham strongly recommends removing one of the bike lanes to reduce the need for a retaining wall. He also agrees with Commissioner Clow that narrowing the roadway would slow traffic

along Arastradero Road. If a wall must be built, Commissioner Abraham would like to see a three foot retaining wall with a pathway along the top, and a second wall behind the three foot wall, if a second wall should be required. He would not mind a shotcrete boulderscape wall at three feet high. He believes a three foot wall would be easy to screen with vegetation.

**Commissioner Harpootlian** agrees with Commissioner Clow that traffic speeds along Arastradero Road need to be addressed. Having wider roads will only invite more traffic into the community. Commissioner Harpootlian would also like to see the bicycle lanes and pathways be consistent with what is generally done in Los Altos Hills. Regarding the design of the wall, he would not like to see a ten foot wall. Commissioner Harpootlian would like to acquire information regarding major arterial roads throughout Town, and how they are currently treated as far as width of road and width of bike, pedestrian, and equestrian paths.

**Debbie Pedro** noted that currently there is no proposed widening of the road, but that narrowing the road is an option that will be considered.

She explained that the General Plan identifies road types based on whether the road is a place where traffic feeds into Town. There are no standards identifying the width of pavement on the road. This is due to the topography of the Town and the winding nature of many Town roads. She explained that what is being proposed with the project is the construction of some missing segments of a pathway that is identified on the Master Path Plan. The Master Path Plan identifies Arastradero as an arterial road which has nothing to do with regulating road width.

**Richard Chiu** told the Commission that the Town could look into shrinking the size of the travel lane, along with other components of the roadway. The original intent of the project is to include bike lanes on both sides of the road because currently bikes travel on both sides of Arastradero Road. He stated that it is desirable for roads to have a shoulder in the case that someone will need to pull over.

**Chairman Collins** agrees with her fellow Commissioners that she would like to see further consideration and work on the design of the wall, with the intention of making the wall as small and short as possible. Regarding the texture of the wall, she believes the Shotcrete Boulderscape Wall is the best option because it is the narrowest. She does not believe that the Town has the climate for the Stacked Crib Wall. Her overall goal for staff is to rethink the project and provide alternatives to having a ten foot wall, and possibly not having a wall at all.

**Chairman Collins** summed up the recommendation of the Planning Commission for staff. The Commission has directed staff to redesign the retaining wall and roadway to get the wall as small as possible, and the road to its minimum legal width. If a wall is absolutely necessary, then the Commission recommends a Stacked Crib, Living Wall.

**Commissioner Partridge** returned to the dais.

4. OLD BUSINESS – none.
5. NEW BUSINESS – none.

6. REPORTS FROM THE CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

- 6.1 Planning Commission Representative for December 7 – Commissioner Harpootlian
- 6.2 Planning Commission Representative for January 19 – Commissioner Collins
- 6.3 Planning Commission Representative for February 16 – Commissioner Clow
- 6.4 Planning Commission Representative for March 15 – Commissioner Partridge

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- 7.1 Approval of November 3, 2011 minutes.

MOTION MADE, SECONDED, AND PASSED BY CONSENSUS: Motioned by Commissioner Abraham and seconded by Commissioner Clow to approve the November 3, 2011 minutes, as corrected.

8. REPORTS FROM FAST TRACK MEETING – none.

9. REPORTS FROM SITE DEVELOPMENT MEETINGS – NOVEMBER 8, NOVEMBER 22, AND NOVEMBER 29, 2011

- 9.1 LANDS OF MALIUANAG; 26760 St. Francis Drive; File #157-11-ZP-SD; A request for a Site Development Permit for a 932 square foot first and second story addition and major remodel (maximum height 26'). CEQA review: Categorical Exemption per Section 15301 (e) (staff-Brian Froelich). (Approved with conditions).
- 9.2 LANDS OF HEIT; 27753 Sherlock Road; File #123-11-ZP-SD; A request for a Site Development Permit of a landscape screening plan for a new 4,266 square foot residence with a basement and swimming pool (maximum height: 26'6") that was approved on March 25, 2008. CEQA review: Categorical Exemption per Section 15304 (b) (Staff-Nicole Horvitz). (Approved with conditions).
- 9.3 LANDS OF HITZ; 26026 Scarff Way; File #265-11-ZP-SD; A request for a Site Development Permit for a 1,144 square foot photovoltaic solar array (52'L x 22'W) maximum height is 6'. CEQA review: Categorical Exemption per Section 15303(e) (staff-Nicole Horvitz). (Approved with conditions).
- 9.4 LANDS OF ZHU/XU; 24920 La Loma Court; File #127-11-ZP-SD; A request for a Site Development Permit of a landscape screening plan for a new two story residence approved on February 24, 2009. CEQA review: Categorical Exemption per Section 15304 (b) (Staff-Nicole Horvitz). (Approved with conditions).

- 9.5 LANDS OF MERCADANTE; 26471 Weston Drive; File #246-11-SD-ZP;  
A request for a Site Development Permit for a 460 square foot addition and  
remodel (maximum height 24'). CEQA review: Categorical Exemption per  
Section 15301 (e) (staff-Brian Froelich). (Approved with conditions).

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned by consensus at 9:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Corso  
Community Development Specialist

The minutes of the December 1, 2011, Planning Commission meeting were approved as corrected  
at the January 5, 2012, Planning Commission meeting.